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ABSTRACT

The social values orientation of Canadian adolescents and pre-adolescents was analyzed to determine the effects of television choice on their values. Youth were randomly selected from ethnic and non-ethnic populations in Montreal and Windsor by percentages of subgroups listed in Statistics Canada for each city. It was assumed that ethnic and non-ethnic adolescents and pre-adolescents would differ in their value orientation, that social and moral values held by ethnic parents and youth would differ from those of non-ethnic parents and youth, and that these differences would be reflected in perceptions about television heroes and content. The most important question was whether or not heroes transmit values or simply reinforce them. An initial questionnaire indicated family attitudes about a number of social interactions values, against which six weeks of observations of viewers was compared. Findings indicate that television viewing during adolescence for both ethnic and non-ethnic groups appears to be related to personal need and identity, as well as to entertainment, and values appear to be reinforced by television. (Author/JEG)

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PARENTS, ADOLESCENTS AND TELEVISION: PART I

ADOLESCENTS AND TELEVISION HEROES: THE PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL VALUES IN FAVORITE TELEVISION SERIES

prepared by
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ADOLESCENTS, PRE-ADOLESCENTS AND TELEVISION:

THE PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL VALUES IN FAVORITE TELEVISION SERIES

A PANEL STUDY

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ADOLESCENTS, PRE-ADOLESCENTS AND TELEVISION HEROES: THE PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL VALUES IN FAVORITE TELEVISION SERIES (A PANEL STUDY)

An analysis of the social values orientation of adolescents and pre-adolescents was made in the first extensive panel study of young Canadians and to determine the effects of television choice on their values. The youths were randomly selected from ethnic and non-ethnic populations in Montreal and Windsor, Canada, in accordance with percentages of subgroups listed in Statistics Canada for each city. These percentages were further studied at the school district level. Ethnic origin is important in Canadian studies because of the high percentage of immigrants to the total population and the government policy supporting multi-culturalism. It was a key assumption that ethnic and non-ethnic adolescents and pre-adolescents would probably be different in their value orientation, that social and moral values held as important by ethnic parents and youth would differ from those of non-ethnic parents and youth and be reflected in perceptions about television heroes and content. It was not certain that the difference would be significant. The most important question was whether or not heroes transmit values or simply reinforce them, that is, do viewers choose programs that already represent the values they hold or do they perceive television as a means of finding out what other people's values are in order to imitate them?

It was assumed that only a panel study would reflect the true pattern of values perception in television viewing. The patterns of perception of the two age groups, the sexes and the ethnic/non-ethnic parents and youth could then be compared. Any significant difference in the values perceived in the actions and statements of TV characters, then assimilated and judged, perhaps even used in personal situations, would show whether television was influential. An initial questionnaire would

indicate family attitudes about a number of social interaction values, against which the six-weeks of observations of viewers could be compared.

Potentially, a panel study could also reveal the effects of hero worship on self-image, attitudes towards parents and their values, attitudes toward social and cultural group memberships.

Because of the need for more continuous evaluation of network programming, an important secondary goal of the study was to test economical means of doing regular assessment of television programs through viewer feedback on perceptions of messages transmitted. In the English Canadian television situation, cultural and social impact of U.S. programming (series) has important policy implications due to the popularity of sitcoms and adventure series.

The study reported was the first attempt to do a longitudinal study of family television viewing in the home to increase the accuracy of findings. Also, in many surveys, self-report was shown to be unreliable. Repeated measures were used to correct it.

Adolescents and pre-adolescents were chosen because the age groups are heavy users of television and the age brackets show tendencies of concern about self-image, of identifying with groups and ideas. A dearth of youth programming makes both groups heavy viewers of adult programs, a fact that concerns many parents and educators. Compounding the problem, U.S. programming generates a high number of youth-oriented series having appeal to youngsters outside the U.S. The youth cult series makes up a large portion of American television and retains its appeal across language and national barriers. An analysis of the appeal factors, of the effects on the family and social values of Canadian youth, is obligatory before any recommendations about changes in policy and programming in Canada can be intelligently formulated.

It was theorized that pre-adolescents and adolescents select programs based on socialization needs and the potential for the programs not only to entertain, but to fill the need to know how to act in certain social situations, to know what is acceptable social behavior. This assessment proved to be quite accurate about adolescents, less so about pre-adolescents.

Related Literature

Hero influence was perceived as important in this study. However, no hero-specific research has been undertaken, although general studies of hero influence were done by Halloran, Bryan and Flapan. The cumulative effects of television on children are shown to be inconclusive in the literature. But it can be inferred from Hess and Goldman, Chaffee and Himmelweit that parents still influence adolescent choice of television. Attitude reinforcement by television appears to be of the family-preferred type. Social conformity appears to be reinforced by programs young people "select" (Chaffee, Gans, Barcus, Himmelweit, Dominick and Weigel).

Schramm and Chaffee point out an important fact about the general state of adolescents, that they need a warm, secure family life, support and understanding from parents. A lack of such support appears to be sought vicariously through television. Chaffee recommended further research on communication and affection to reveal more clearly the status of family relationships at this important period.

In order to study the effects of television heroes on the values of adolescents and pre-adolescents, in order to measure and compare parental and television hero/heroine influence, a method of analysis would have to measure ideas and events perceived, rather than programs themselves. If viewer comments were received about different series, different viewers in different geographical locations, watching different heroes could be assessed through their comments on the values dimensions of their responses. The "importance-to-viewer" measure used by Edelstein was adopted for

this purpose. This type of measurement established equivalency of importance ranking of ideas (and their inherent values) by viewers, which can then be compared within and between groups. Audiotape recordings, first used in Germany, were seen as critical to obtaining an accurate self-report in the open-end questionnaire situation and as a means of control for researcher bias. Self-report and bias have confounded and often rendered useless the findings in many viewer opinion studies.

The notion of decomposing television messages was recommended by Gerbner as a means of studying the underlying value structures in messages. The values list developed by Rubenstein and others was chosen but actual experience with coding proved difficult and a high percentage of disagreement occurred. Therefore, the prosocial specific behaviors were replaced with the value classes (prosocial) obtained in the initial interview with each family member. These proved to be more easily identifiable in statements about heroes and story content and were used with little disagreement in the coding stage. A prosocial values construct is essential and the coding of anti-social values is also important. Since the pro/anti social categories used by Rubenstein, Gerbner and others, were not used, a means of coding anti-social values was devised from the family prosocial values inventory using a plus/minus designation.

Not only the values perceived were important, what the viewer does with the information transmitted was important. The studies of Katz regarding viewer attitudes toward network violation of taste and mores, were also of interest. Katz framed the importance of the viewer in the question "what does the viewer see; only the viewer knows what he saw." In other words, what do peopledo with media, thus departing from prior research assumptions that media does something to people. The question raised in our study was what kinds of information on social roles and values

do adolescents seek from television. Values were seen as a reflection of cultural or social group membership. Innis perceived values as important in traditional cultures, less so, in technologically-oriented societies. Values of ethnic parents, if reflected in their adolescents and pre-adolescents would show that parental influence was important in "assigning" meaning to television content. Values influence is one of the principal ways in which parents maintain ties to their culture and the way in which they influence their children to remain within the culture of the community. Adolescents and pre-adolescents, on the other hand, would show concern for peer group memberships, and it was theorized, that they would adopt the dress, speech mannerisms, social customs and activities of their peers and their television heroes and heroines. A longitudinal study would reflect the source of the influence as television and/or peer group.

Self-esteem tends to be exaggerated in single self-report studies. Repeated measures of viewer observations might reveal a truer picture. Because of unreliability of self report in prior studies, a combined measure seemed useful. Based on a review of studies on children, judgmental ability estimates, assessments of hero charactistics, combined with self-report on self-image, appeared to offer potential for more accurate measurement.

The literature has little to say about the impact of television series as compared with individual programs. However, higher motivation appears to sustain regular viewing of favorite series. Higher motivation, it was theorized, would result in higher recall, an important factor when studying the age groups viewing over a long period of time. If different viewers prefer different programs, as is usually the case, only the importance-to-viewer ranking could be used to obtain a statistical analysis of viewer perceptions of information in order to permit comparisons.

This equivalency of statements was necessary in order to make valid measurements of perceived messages and relate them to underlying values. Edelstein's study of decisionmaking based on media use and person-to-person communication about local, national and international issues, which used the equivalency construct showed the viability of this assessment of different statements from different persons of different cultures as the events were perceived by people themselves and not as delineated by the researcher. The shift in media studies to viewer perceptions of media content adds a meaningful dimension to the research looking at media impact.

Conceptualizing the Problem

In order to assign values to the statements of viewers about perceptions of content, it was necessary to establish a values inventory with which the age groups would be familiar and which would reflect social behavior norms. After experiencing coding difficulties with the Rubenstein list of prosocial values which reflected specific behaviors, it was decided to use the list of values received from each respondent during the intial interview questionnaire. These values represented their opinions on the important classes of behavior needed to have good ongoing relationships with people. Classes of behavior were easier to code and were easier for respondents to operationalize as specific actions or behaviors. The classes of behavior mentioned over the whole sample,(although in different rank order,individual depending on age, sex, ethnicity)were:

love	guidance	justice,fairness	friendship	being responsible
respect	communication	trust	encouragement	understanding
obedience	shared experience	goodness	independence	or empathy
care, concern	security	discipline	cooperation or compromise	

The classes are listed in rank order of the total sample.

In addition, when viewers reported on behaviors in television program "patience or perseverance" and "achievement" were mentioned repeatedly by viewers as classes of behviors observed in TV characters. Because the observations were numerous by adolescents, it was important to add these classes to the values inventory.

Coding prosocial and antisocial attitudes or behaviors reflected in the statements of recall, in a simple manner, was equally important. Therefore, antisocial behaviors belonging to the classes on the list were defined as the "absence of the postive value". This definition provided the means for a simplified numerical designation.

For instance, the values were numbered 1-22 and a plus (+) or minus (-) designation was added to the number to indicate prosocial or antisocial aspect of the value. Loving would be coded 1+, and unloving would be coded 1- under this system. As a class, lovingness, provided for individual expressions of the value behavior without invalidating the classification. This, in turn, permitted questioning ten-year olds and fourteen-year olds as to what they meant by their statements about actions of television characters without their having to give uniform answers.

Data Reduction

Because an open-ended questionnaire was used, reduction of the response for coding was an important step. A two-step processing of information was used:

Step 1: The free response data was reduced for computer coding by extracting key words representing the full response and aimed toward the goal of the study (observation of behaviors and statements reflecting prosocial and antisocial values). Space for observation of up to seven events per question were provided on each computer card. However additional computer cards could be added by the researcher/coder if the response warranted it.

Step 2: The key words which represented the observations of the viewer were then reassigned a value classification with a plus or minus designation

The source of measurement were observations of behaviors, judgments, attitudes, motives, projections by viewer to life. Ranking, frequency, restatement, number of

descriptive items and their quality, provded a qualitative and quantitative analysis of viewer perceptions.

Sampling

Percentages of cultural groups according to Statistics Canada were initially scanned to determine which groups would be included in the sample. These were analyzed together with school districts lists which note mother tongue of parents and give percentages within the school populations of the dominant and subcultural groups. In Montreal, English,French, Greek , Chinese, Jewish and Black were selected for the protestant-english districts and English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese for the catholic-English school districts . However, due to the political situation caused by the Language Law, no Greeks or Chinese would participate, so these ethnic groups were sought in Windsor's sample. In Windsor, English, French, Italian, Jewish, Greek, Arab were selected. Rate of refusal was high among ethnic groups, exceeding 60%. Names were selected randomly from the age and ethnic groups until the desired sample was attained.

Montreal schools were selected, based on distribution of ethnic neighborhoods and social class. Since most ethnic groups inhabit the area immediately surrounding Mount Royal, a circle with a 2-mile radius was drawn around the mountain to include the English side of the city. Schools representing heterogeneous and homogeneous populations and classes within that area were selected on a 2-1 ratio (hetero-to homogeneous) and approached for cooperation. School lists were used wherever possible. However, due to the political situation, researchers were directed to other sources for the names of ethnic children by school officials (youth centers,"Y"s). In Windsor, also, more cooperation was received from community centers than schools although school districts provided the information on the location of ethnic groups and age groups needed for the study.

Experiment

Prior to taking repeated measures on parents and children, an initial questionnaire was administered separately to each person participating in the study. Sixty-three persons were studied over six weeks to determine how viewers perceive media messages, but the initial interview obtained background data on ethnicity, values, media habits, lifestyle and family relationships in order to make a more valid assessment of responses on the repeat questionnaires. The following design was used.

Age	Ethnicity	View with Family/Discuss	View with Family/No Discuss.	View alone
10	Ethnic			
	Non-Ethnic			
14	Ethnic			
	Non-ethnic			

A minimum of two families per cell, provided, through repeated measurement, a total of over 200 measures for the children and another 200 measures for parents. The effects of age, ethnicity, discussion, viewing with family or alone were studied as they relate to perceived messages. There were 13 children from Montreal, 14 from Windsor. Of these 12 were ethnics. There were 38 parents in all. Agewise, there were 12 ten-year olds and 15 fourteen-year olds.

Statistical Analysis

Chi^2 contingency analysis was made of responses to measure differences due to age, sex and ethnicity. Proportionate analysis of groups was made due to unevenness. Data collection by interview questionnaire and observation, as well as audiotape recordings enabled researchers to isolate tendencies and trends that could be described but could not be statistically analyzed and are so reported.

The major portion of the analysis deals with family values inventory and the importance rating given by ethnic/non-ethnic parents and youth to observations about content in television series watched over the six weeks. A further subdivision of youth into ten-year old preadolescents and fourteen-year old adolescents is provided. Sex differences analysis provided other insights.

An item-per-item analysis using all pairwise comparisons of the above-mentioned factors showed no significant rating differences of all the values. Secondly, when dealing with ethnic/non-ethnic parents as a group, and describing their complete value inventory rating, there were no significant differences. Thirdly, the contingency comparison of ethnic/non-ethnic parents and youth showed no <u>total</u> value differences. Finally, as a group, ten-year olds do not differ on the basis of sex or ethnicity.

Significant differences <u>do</u> arise, however, when one examines the fourteen-year old subgroup, $\chi^2_{(3)}=5.475$, $p < .05$. This result shows that girls, specifically ethnic girls, attend to more values than their male counterparts. A further subdivision by age reinforces this conclusion, since in a ten-year old and fourteen-year old comparison of boys and girls, the fourteen-year old girls are again significantly more value-oriented $\chi^2_{(3)}=3.98$, $p < .05$.

Since, with the exception of one subgroup, there were no ethnic/non-ethnic differences on values, a Table and Figure presenting the importance ranking of values were constructed (Table 1 and Figure 1).

It is interesting to note that the fourteen-year old list of values by importance ranking approaches the parents' ranking to a great extent. Fourteen-year olds also tend to be much more discriminative when rating the separate values than ten-year olds. (Table 2).

It was also interesting to note that these values were later reflected in discussions of favorite television programs. Furthermore, it was noted that children notice the presence of these values (prosocial) and/or their absence (antisocial) Table 3.

On analysis, no sex differences were found in the ability to discriminate values. However, an analysis of attending to prosocial or antisocial values in favorite television programs showed significant differences between fourteen-year old girls and boys. Female fourteen-year olds attend to prosocial values in programs significantly more frequently than male fourteen-year olds, $\chi^2_{(1)}=8.02$, $p<.05$. (Table 4).

It was also found that ethnic/non-ethnic differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2_{(1)}=6.59$, $p<.05$. In other words, ethnic children attend to more positive or prosocial values and non-ethnics attend to more negative values. Furthermore, when the age subgroup comparisons were made, it is clear that ten-year olds attend to prosocial values, if any at all, and fourteen-year olds notice both prosocial and antisocial aspects of the television character's behavior, $\chi^2_{(1)}=9.79$, $p<.05$.

Descriptive Data

Two indices of differences between ethnic and non-ethnic families occur when the origin of family values and communication patterns (problem consultation, specifically) are studied. On a purely descriptive basis, the data shows that there are no differences in persons consulted. Both ethnic and non-ethnic families report that they most frequently seek advice and help from mothers if respondent is a child and from husband for the wife, from wife for the husband. However, with respect to problems, when an analysis of current problems of parents and children is made, the discipline/freedom dichotomy of the age period emerges with interesting results. Ethnic youth are more concerned about their lack of freedom, whereas, it is the non-ethnic parents who are most concerned and having difficulty with disciplining their children. When respondents were asked whom they would consult

on a problem, all respondents mentioned a specific referent. When asked whom they did consult recently on their most pressing problem, fifteen out of forty discussed the problem with no one (Tables 5 and 6). There were no differences in the percentages of parents or children, ethnic and non-ethnic on failing to discuss problems. Each group was approximately equal to the other.

The origins of values differ on consideration of ethnicity. The non-ethnic familie perceive their own parents as the major source of values. Ethnic families seem to look to friends (a reflection of cultural community) and to the "tradition-school-church" structures for values. When differences between ethnic mothers and fathers were analyzed fathers, in particular, reported tradition as a source of values.

Once again, on a purely descriptive basis, when ananalysis of values of ethnic and non-ethnic families is made, particularly on values related to passing values or beliefs and attitudes from one generation to another, ethnic families show a much higher concern in these values. The finding is based on analysis of importance ranki given to respect, obedience, and guidance as compared with non-ethnic families.

TV Programs

A descriptive listing of programs selected by ethnic and by non-ethnic children as favorites are compared. Fourteen-year old ethnic children select more prosocial value-related television series than their counterparts. Fourteen-year olds, in general, select more prosocial value-related series than ten-year olds. Mothers generally, select more prosocial value-related series than fathers and children.

It was important to note that more negative values were perceived in "Soap", "Thre Company" and "Charlie's Angels" than in other programs. On the other hand, "Eight is Enough" and "All in the Family" appear to have a prosocial effect on fourteen-

year olds, since these program series generated a high percentage of prosocial value type responses and also generated considerable discussion. Both series were perceived by parents and children as important learning tools for social behaviors and attitudes. Over 80% of responses about these series were prosocial-value related for both parents and children. Antisocial values perceived were judged as antisocial behaviors and attitudes (which could be construed as a positive effect if impact on personal behavior is considered.)

Finally, it is important to note that both age groups, based on analysis of responses, show positive attitudes toward prosocial values perceived and perceived antisocial behaviors as antisocial. Based on interviews and responses about programs, discussion of highly pertinent topics of social concern to adolescents and their families, stimulates discussion and search for additional sources of information on the topics. Watching value-related series in which favorite TV heroes and heroines are the principal motivation, appears to be based on personal need to know socially-acceptable behavior and problem solving strategies for use by the viewer in everyday social activity and possibly, the need to obtain new information about social experiences not yet experienced, but anticipated as probable in the viewer's future. This observation is based on analysis of responses over the six weeks and would not be reflected in a single survey. (See Appendix B).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The values inventory and its plus/minus designation for prosocial and antisocial aspects of a given value is viable as a classification tool and pertinent to new directions in use and gratifications research. The use of perception as the key to analysis of values reflected in statements of viewers is critical and recommended. Data reduction methods provided a means for managing open-ended questionnaire data without distorting the viewer's intent.

Television viewing during adolescence appears to be related to personal need and identity as well as to entertainment. Values appear to be reinforced by television. Responses confirm the use of information from TV series as social role model information, self-image, vicarious experience and as an information source for solving social problems. Values appear to come from parents and adolescents, in particular, select programming which support social values inculcated by parents. Need appears to be the motive for media choice and use. Whether media content is perceived, determines whether media content is an influence on the viewer.

Selection of favorite television programs appears to be influenced indirectly by parents through values. Chaffee, Himmelweit, Hess and Goldman found parental influence of parents on adolescents choice of programs.

It is recommended that the values classification be used on other kinds of programming with other audience groups to confirm its coding reliability. The fact that it avoids the problem of verifying specific actions and uses classes of action is particularly important when viewer differences occur in language, education and experience, areas that could affect reliability of comprehension of specific act definitions. Also, the fact that a list of about 20 values can cover a broad range of actions simplifies practical research that is production related, where trends are important, not specifics.

The importance-to-viewer ranking, combined with repeated measures, permits measurement from different sources while minimizing effects of individual differences, two problems affecting all viewer research trying to arrive at patterns of viewing and cognitive processing of media information. These techniques improve chances of meaningful results in use and gratification research.